

Story Paper

Collectors

Vol 33

Dec.
1979

Digest

No 396



26p

HWEBB
79.

Best wishes for Xmas and New Year to all my customers/friends!

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 33

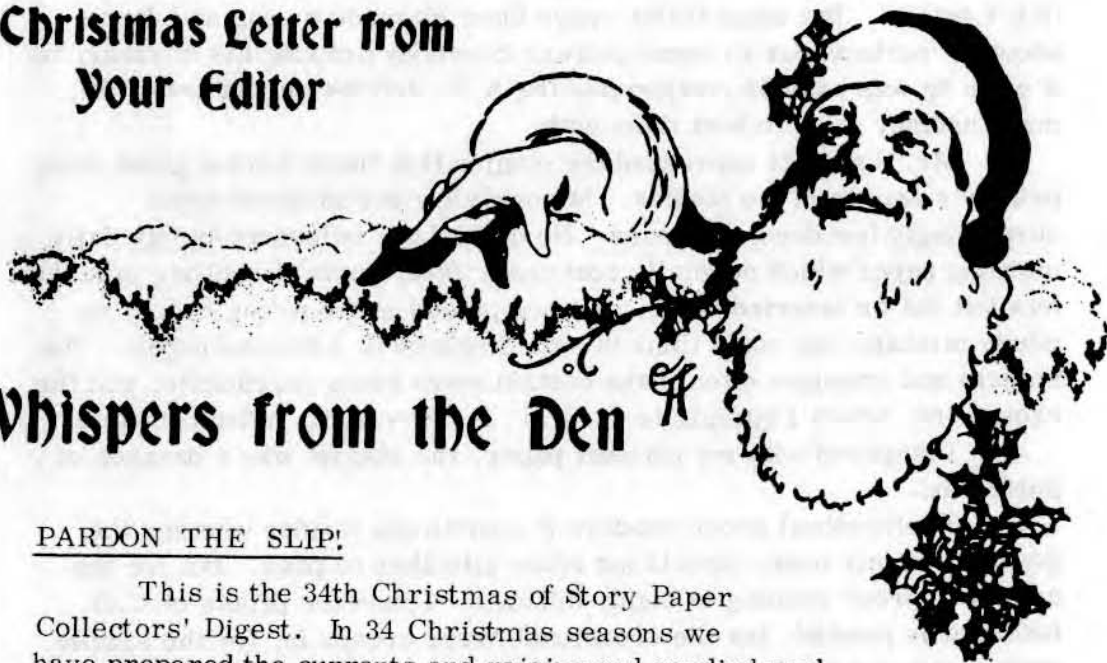
No. 396

DECEMBER 1979

Price 26p

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Christmas Letter from Your Editor



Whispers from the Den

PARDON THE SLIP!

This is the 34th Christmas of Story Paper Collectors' Digest. In 34 Christmas seasons we have prepared the currants and raisins and candied peel for the pudding, and my mother used to say that Christmas puddings improve with keeping.

Which is a mere excuse for saying, in a festive way, that a few of us have been writing appraisals of the Hamilton work for a very, very long time. In consequence, it is hard to find a new slant on a very well-travelled road.

Last month our contributor, Mr. Harold Truscott, managed to find one of those new slants which are so difficult to find at Christmas 1979. In an excellent article, all the more enjoyable for being a new view, he talked of how slips made by type-setters or proof-readers could spoil what an author intended to be a striking joke or a rib-tickling situation.

Inevitably, with an article on such a topic, one is reminded of the ludicrous sentence about babies, which featured in the abysmal sub-story "Linley Minor" in the Magnet of early 1917. Whether Hamilton heard of it at the time, we do not know. Probably, even if he did, he didn't bother. But some thirty years later he made a song and dance about it, perhaps due to some postwar busybody drawing his attention to it when he was roundly condemning the A.P. and the sub writers. It made another stick to beat them with.

Mr. Truscott expressed the opinion that there were a great many printer's errors in the Magnet. My own view is that there were surprisingly few down the years. No doubt I am influenced by my daily morning paper which normally contains a great mass of spelling mistakes, bits left out or inserted twice, or lines placed in the wrong order, or plenty mishaps one could think of as a disgrace to a famous paper. The smears and smudges often make certain news items unreadable, and the crossword, which I attempt to unravel, is often partly indecipherable.

Compared with my national paper, the Magnet was a paragon of perfection.

Professional proof-readers (I sometimes wonder whether the genus is extinct today) should not allow mistakes to pass. But for the amateur, proof-reading is highly difficult. I read the proofs of C.D. before it is printed, but the occasional error creeps in, for the simple reason that one tends to read, not what is there, but what one knows should be there.

I recall a Mr. Buddle tale in which a boy, who had unclean finger-nails, expressed the wish to be a doctor when he left school. Mr. Buddle observed (I am quoting only from memory) that he hoped the boy would attend more to his personal hygiene before it became necessary for him to employ his "bedside" manner. I read it in the proofs as bedside because I knew it should be bedside, but, in fact, it

really said "beside manner" which completely spoiled the point.

I have no doubt at all that Charles Hamilton suffered at times from printer's errors or careless proof-reading, and Mr. Truscott quotes some fascinating examples, particularly the one about "Rein".

All the same, I would not be surprised if the main culprit was not Hamilton himself. He always stated emphatically that he typed his thoughts straight on to his machine, he never re-read his work, and under no circumstances did he ever re-write anything once it was done. Knowing his immense output, we can well think such habits were unavoidable. But only the most professional of men could make such a claim, and it would seem likely that errors must creep in now and then. He must have relied a great deal on his proof-readers, for even the most expert of typists finds at times that he has put down the most wired and wendroful thgins. Get me?

THE LIMIT

The other evening, on TV, I heard a member of Parliament expressing the view that all Public Schools should be closed down. The usual argument for the desirability of such a happening, it seems to me, is that because we can't all go to St. Frank's, then none of us should be allowed to go to St. Frank's. On this occasion, however, the argument was a little different. The M.P. in question seemed to be asserting that a strong point against the Public Schools is that they would bring back the "humiliating" system of boys being addressed by their surnames.

It surprised me, for I did not realise that the habit of using surnames for boys at school had ever gone out. I had a horrid vision of Mr. Quelch saying to the Bounder: "Herbie, if you feel so inclined, will you kindly construe?" Or, to Snoop: "Siddeney, please stop shuffling your feet, dear." Or to Bolsover: "Percy, your lovely hair is swishing into Kevin's inkpot behind you."

I can only say that, when I was a lad at school, none of us found anything humiliating in being addressed by our surnames. In fact, we took pride in it, if we didn't take it for granted. We would have squirmed if somebody has called us by our front names, just like Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd did when Clarence Cuffy came mincing up and called

them James and Thomas.

One of Charles Hamilton's most delightful stories from the Golden Age of the blue Gem was entitled "The Limit". Mr. Lathom was away from the school for some reason, and his form was put temporarily in the charge of a schoolmistress named Miss Ponsonby. Miss Ponsonby treated Mr. Lathom's boys as she had been accustomed to treat her form of girls, and she called them all by their christian names. She wasn't a very good disciplinarian, it turned out. But it was great fun for the reader.

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER

I had arrived back about nine from my daily hospital visit. I had attended to a number of telephone calls. I was having a light supper, when I heard the rattle of the cat-door in the kitchen. I went out into the hall, and there was the Princess Snowee looking very well-satisfied with herself. Beside her lay the corpse of a mouse. With a few words to her about being so remiss as to bring home so unwelcome a visitor, I picked up the mouse corpse by the tail and dropped it into the pedal-bin in the kitchen, intending to transfer it to the dustbin later. Such a happening is the one drawback of the cat-door, especially if you have an adventurous puss.

I finished my supper, and did some C.D. work. Somewhere about midnight, I went to lock up everywhere. I opened the pedal-bin to throw inside spent matches and the dottle from the pipe I had been smoking during the past hour. To my astonishment, there was the mouse, no longer a corpse, but running round and round and round in the bottom of the bin. It was very much alive.

I should have killed it, of course, but I couldn't. My heart smote me at the thought of the little rodent living through the nightmare of being carried in a cat's mouth from somewhere in the wilds at the back of the house; reviving in the pedal-bin; and then falling a victim to me brandishing a hammer or calling Snowee to deal with her guest. I couldn't.

I got a torch, and then took out the pedal-bin with the mouse still running in circles within. I carried it well down the silent lane. I came to a big, wide stretch of grass. Gently I tilted the bin, and the

mouse scuttled away into the comparative safety of the grass.

When I got home, I am sure there was a look of the utmost contempt in the expressive eyes of the Princess Snowee.

I wonder what Mr. Wilde's Jamie or Mr. Partis's Whiskas, or Mrs. Packman's Bebe, not to mention Mr. Softee, would have thought of me.

CHRISTMAS

All being well, when this Christmas Number reaches you, the C.D. Annual will not be far behind. It is my opinion that, in this year's edition, we have the finest collection of hobby articles ever. I am confident that you will say the same. All those who want the 1979 Annual will have ordered it by now, and I hope that it will add pleasure to your Christmas.

I wish all my readers the Happiest Christmas they have ever had, with the added hope that the New Year will bring you everything you yourselves hope for.

Madam has just asked me to send you all her personal good wishes for the Christmas Season, and to renew to you our thanks for the hope and encouragement which you gave us when she was so ill in the summer. She has all your beautiful "Get Well" cards, and the letters which you sent during that anxious time, in an album which we shall value till the end of our days.

A Happy Christmas, everyone.

THE EDITOR

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Mr. W. O. G. LOFTS

Mr. Loft's has had a spell of bad health recently. His doctor has advised him to do no research work during the next few months, and it is particularly requested that readers will not write to him with any questions for some time to come.

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WANTED: 1959 Collectors' Digest Annual, Magnets between Nos. 1 to 770; S.B.L.'s 1st and 2nd Series. Telephone 711874.

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Danny's Christmas

DECEMBER 1929

The first week of the month had the most awful weather I ever remember. The Thames overflowed on several occasions. On the 5th there were very severe gales, ships foundered, and many lives were lost. We lost two tiles off our roof, and the window of Mrs. Tucker's sweetshop was blown in, so there was a mixture of aniseed balls, liquorice strips, Packer's Alpine Mixture, and bits of glass. On the 7th there was a terrible thunderstorm at midnight in London, and near the Thames there were the worst floods for 20 years.

The first issue of the Nelson Lee Library this month was the enlarged Christmas Number, and the story was "The Ghost of Travis Dene". The chums are at Handforth's country home for Christmas and with them are Eileen and Molly Dare and lots of others. There are snowflights, and a ghost, and somebody is kidnapped. Just the thing for Christmas.

Next week "The Peril of the Haunted Room". Vivian Travers is on watch in the haunted room, a panel opens, and a hand holding a revolver appears. A thrilling series, but too short for it ended with this second story. But it was eerie and exciting while it lasted.

For the next story we are back at St. Frank's for a new series, and we meet "The Worst Boy in the School". This new boy is a bad character, and, quaintly enough, he is the uncle of Edgar Fenton, the captain of St. Frank's. And this uncle of his brings much worry to the popular skipper.

There has been a most terrible disaster in Paisley. 70 children died in a panic in a cinema at a children's matinee. The cinema filled with smoke, and the youngsters made a rush for the exits. The irony of it all was that there was no actual fire, it seems, but an operator had put a tin of film on a radiator and forgotten it, and smoke poured out. There is to be a big enquiry into it all.

The Christmas series in the Magnet is just wonderful, and I am sure I have never read anything so good before. It opens with "Coker's

Cracksman". There have been mysterious burglaries in different parts of Kent - and we meet the Head's chauffeur, who is named Barnes, and who seems a very nice type of chap.

The story in the actual Christmas Number is "Quelchy's Christmas Present". The present was to have been a Christmas pudding, but somebody changed the pud for something else. And Wharton and Bunter, out late, come on someone breaking into or out of Hogben Grange. And Barnes, the chauffeur, that nice young man, is not in his room over the garage at the time.

Next, "Billy Bunter's Christmas". Nobody wants Bunter for Christmas, but the Head is on the way to spend a night at Wharton Lodge, and Bunter gets a lift. And Colonel Wharton recognises Barnes, the chauffeur, as a wild young officer named Poynings he once knew. But the Colonel agrees to keep Barnes's secret. Last of the month is "Bunter Comes to Stay". There is a burglary at Sankey Hall near Wharton Lodge, while the Head and his chauffeur are guests at the Lodge. And there is a man with a square jaw, whom Wharton and Bunter saw on the night that Hogben Grange was raided. This spiffing series will go on in the New Year when 1930 arrives. I can't have enough of it.

At the pictures this month we have seen two talkies. They are "Coquette" which is Mary Pickford's first talking picture; she has a tinny voice; and the other one was "Movietone Follies of 1929" which is a musical picture and has some good tunes and dancing spectacles. The silent films have been Marion Davies in "Her Cardboard Lover"; Monty Banks in "Adam's Apple"; Rod la Rocque in "Captain Swagger"; Hoot Gibson in "King of the Rodeo"; Norma Talmadge in "Woman Disputed"; and May McAvoy, Louise Fazenda, and Edward Everett Horton in "The Terror".

There has been a 4-story Christmas series in the Gem. "The Menace of the Wolf" introduced El Lobo who has come from South America to hover over St. Jim's just before breaking-up. There is a South American junior named Callao Garcia who fights a bull in the quad.

Next "Betrayed" in which Sir Napier Wynter, Kildare's uncle, invites Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., Talbot, etc., to spend Christmas in his home in the Welsh mountains. And the South American junior is there, too. Next, "The House on the Mountains" carries on

with the same complicated plot and Tom Merry is tied to a frame and daggers are thrown all round him. To add to the complications, the Spalding Hall girls join the party. Wow!

The series ends with "The Return of the Wolf".

I only had one Schoolboys' Own Library this month. It is called "The Shylock of Greyfriars" and it is an early tale about Fisher T. Fish and his money-raising adventures.

Dr. Johnson's house in Gough Square in London has been given to the nation by Mr. Cecil Harmsworth. A nice little Christmas present. And our other airship, sister ship to the R 101 - this one is the R 100 - has had her first flight from Howden to Cardington. It will be a proud day when both airships are in regular service.

The Rio Kid has been tip-top this month as always. In "The Hold-Up", the Kid rescues a rancher from the Jadwin gang. In "The Trail in the Snow", the Kid helps the sole surviving brother of the Jadwin gang, and the old feud is buried. In "Trapping the Kid", the Kid decides to go to see his old friend who owns the Sundance Ranch, but finds his friend has sold the ranch to Lester Leigh, six months earlier. Leigh tells the Kid he can spend the night with the bunch in the bunkhouse, and the Kid is glad to get out of the snow. But Leigh has discovered that the visitor is the Rio Kid, for whom there is a big reward, and he sends for the Sheriff. The Kid escapes, but he is furious at the rancher's treachery. In "The Rio Kid's Christmas Gift", the Kid comes back to the ranch to shoot the rancher. A fancy-dress party is on, and the Kid holds up Young Tom Harrigan, and pinches his Father Christmas outfit. And, in this outfit, the Kid is able to pass the sheriff and get to the rancher. Just as the Kid is about to shoot the rancher, the man's little daughter comes and knocks on the door - and the Kid gives her back her father as a gift from Father Christmas. And the Kid rides away on his grey mustang. Lovely Christmas tale.

In the third week of the month, a new long series of detective stories about Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake began, and St. Jim's was dropped from the programme.

The most popular tune of the day is "I'll Always Be In Love With You". It comes from the film "Syncopation" which will be showing at a local cinema next month, and I hope to see it. A lovely dreamy song.

I bought Doug the record for Christmas, played as an organ solo by Jesse Crawford. He seems pleased with it.

The Modern Boy had a lovely snowy picture on the cover of its Christmas Number - motor-cyclists reaching home through the snow - though the contents were a bit meagre. G. E. Rochester's air tale is good, and Alfred Edgar's yarn about a boy tug-owner is unusual.

On New Year's Eve Dad took us to the Royal Artillery Theatre at Woolwich, and we saw, on the stage, Henry Edwards and Chrissie White in "The Flag Lieutenant". They used to be famous long ago, so Mum says, in British Hepworth films.

So the year ends. The sunniest year for 39 years, in spite of the rain this December.

I read that, on the last day of the Old Year, the trams ran for the last time in Cradley Heath.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S. O. L. No. 113, "The Shylock of Greyfriars", consisted of a red Magnet tale "The Schoolboy Moneylender" of the Spring of 1913 plus a number of chapters from "The Competition Craze at Greyfriars" which had appeared in the late summer of 1912. S. O. L. No. 114 was "The Kid at Katie's" by Michael Poole, part of a series which appeared at the back of the Gem for a time.

The arrival of Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake in stories which were long by Popular standards was really the beginning of the end for that fine old paper. It was the first of the changes which brought about the end, though the paper still had a goodly time to run when 1929 bowed itself out.

The Hepworth British films, which Danny mentions this month, were made in a studio in Brentford, near Kew Bridge. Many years later those studios became the famous "Q" Theatre. Hepworth films were deservedly popular in their time, but they had been gone a long time by late 1929. Henry Edwards and Chrissie White had long left their film-starring days behind them when Danny saw them in "The Flag Lieutenant", or so one would think.)

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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Just a short preamble this month as the contents of Blakiana are rather long. I take this opportunity to wish all my readers a Happy Christmas and also many thanks for the material which has been sent to me during the past year.

THE DOCTOR HUXTON RYMER STORY

by Josie Packman

Part 5

A tale of a very different kind appeared in the Union Jack No. 1000. It was called "The Thousandth Chance" and was specially written for that number. The theme was excellent but the story suffered from being too short. The space allowed in those far-off days of 1922 was not enough to develop a decent plot such as appeared in the famous double numbers. This Christmas story could have been much better as a full-length Sexton Blake Library tale. A number of Blake's opponents were invited to Abbey Towers by Rymer at the request of Wu Ling who had a plot to steal Blake's art treasures, and required assistance. All he wanted for himself was the Ling-tse vase, the others could have the rest. Naturally the plot failed. A later Christmas story in No. 1105 in 1924 featured Rymer and Mary Trent, together with Plummer, in a "Christmas Truce" which was fairly successful.

Many of the later stories appearing in the Union Jack up to the end of 1925 were what one might call for want of a better title "odd ones out", meaning just adventures which although interesting were not all part of the Saga. No. 1110 for instance, "The Treasure of Tortoise Island" was a shortened version of the "Case of the Radium Patient" of 1914. The last story of Dr. Huxton Rymer in the U.J. in this second edition No. 1177, "The Case of the Stricken Outpost" was a tale of a Canadian town stricken with an epidemic in which Blake and Rymer together bring aid to the people. Only four more tales appeared in the later Union Jacks and these will form part of the third section of this story of Dr. Huxton Rymer.

Following is a list of tales as they should have been published in correct order.

- Sexton Blake Library No. 219 dated March 1922, "The Ivory Screen".
 " " " No. 229 " May 1922, "The Spirit Smugglers".
 " " " No. 253 " Oct. 1922, "Case of the Courtland
 Jewels".
- Union Jack No. 980 dated July 1922, "The Case of the Winfield Handicap".
 " " No. 981 " July 1922, "Sexton Blake's Blunder".
 " " No. 982 " July 1922, "The Case of the Richshaw Coolie".
 " " No. 984 " August 1922, "The Voodoo Curse".
- Sexton Blake Library No. 271, February 1923, "The Secret Emerald
 Mines".
- Union Jack No. 1014 dated 17 March, 1923, "The Pearls of Benjemasin".
 " " No. 1015 " 24 March, 1923, "The Painted Window".
 " " No. 1017 " 7 April, 1923, "The Indian Fakir".
 " " No. 1020 " 28 April, 1923, "The Mystery of the Moving
 Mountain".
- Sexton Blake Library No. 283, May 1923, "The Eight-pointed Star".
 " " " No. 307, Nov. 1923, "The Crimson Belt".
- Union Jack No. 1047, dated Nov. 1923, "Huxton Rymer, President".
- Sexton Blake Library No. 312, December 1923, "The Orloff Diamond".
 " " " No. 356, November 1924, "The Case of the
 Clairvoyant's Ruse".
 " " " No. 360, December 1924, "The Case of the Jade
 Handled Knife".

To be continued

THE TOAST IS SEXTON BLAKE

by Raymond Cure

If you are looking for a little Christmas fare with a Sexton Blake flavour, I nominate "Crime at Christmas" directed and produced by Mr. Howard Baker, written by Gwyn Evans and Edwy Searles Brooks, those two masters of the art of Christmas. Pride of place on this occasion going to Gwyn Evans with his four stories culled from the Union Jack.

Edwy Searles Brooks completes this wonderful volume with "The Pauper of Pengarth Castle" and the "Curse of Pengarth Castle". With six tales like this bringing together a host of popular Union Jack characters you are sure of a Christmas treat.

Some time ago I set about borrowing copies of Christmas

numbers of the Union Jack. I was surprised to find they were a bit thin on the ground. Accustomed as I was to tracking down Christmas tales featuring the schoolboy stars of the Nelson Lee and Magnet Christmas masterpieces (with the help of the O.B.B.C. Library services) I had not realised that considering the long life of the Union Jack there was not an abundance of Christmas cheer in the offing. It is because of this that I regard my volume "Crime at Christmas" as special - extra special.

It's no secret that I am a Christmas fan. Maybe that's due to the fact that my parents and my Grandmother always saw we had a good Christmas no matter how rough the rest of the year had treated us. Mention Christmas to me and I can visualise hundred-weights of coloured paper chains, Christmas trees, bowls of oranges, tangerines, apples and nuts, and Meccano set or the like and one of the Annuals (so popular today), Carol singers and a sledge ride in the wonder snow that appeared as if by magic every year around Christmas time in our corner of Leeds. Hosts of Father Christmases in every store, and the pudding! to quote Charles Dickens, every year I could say "Never was there such a pud".

All of which brings me back to "Mrs. Bardell's Christmas Pudding" starring Sexton Blake, Inspector Coutts, Splash Page and of course Mrs. Bardell, not forgetting Tinker and Pedro. There it is plum in the middle of the cover page of U.J. No. 1157, 12 December, 1925, Mrs. Bardell's Christmas pudding, just about to vanish by the look of it for a pair of thieving hands are hovering over it. Between these covers are nine chapters of seasonable crime and fun, followed immediately by "Mrs. Bardell's Christmas Eve". Gwyn Evans was a light humorous writer, sometimes writing with his tongue in cheek as the saying goes. One of the modern writers who reminds me of Gwyn Evans is Jack Trevor Story who by the way, came over fine on TV on a series of six on "Jack Trevor Story", "The Affair of the Black Carol" and "The Crime of the Christmas Tree" brings Gwyn Evans Christmas offering for 1925 to 1929 to a close, and for a Sexton Blake fan and a lover of Christmas one couldn't wish for anything better.

Edwy Searles Brooks takes over at this stage with his "Pauper of Pengarth Castle" and "Curse of Pengarth Castle" and though these are dated as late as 13 and 20 June they have the Christmas touch as the ghostly monk hovering over Pengarth Castle dominating the cover page

will prove. Starring Waldo the Wonderman and Sexton Blake, two tales from the thrill a minute pen of Edwy Searles Brooks.

Well now, I read it all last Christmas, and guess what - God-willing, I have it lined up again for this Christmas. Christmas 1979 and the toast is Sexton Blake though if Blake could be with us in the flesh methinks he would propose a toast to Gwyn Evans and Edwy Searles Brooks, not to mention Howard Baker also. They whose combined efforts have kept Blake alive for us in the year of our Lord 1979 and for those of us alive in the Christmases yet to come.

LOBANGU AS COMIC RELIEF

by Ray Hopkins

Sexton Blake as practical joker is an intriguing thought, but this is the role he is playing in "The Ghosts of Losely Hall" (Union Jack 960, 4 March, 1922) when he gives Tinker's morning sausage to Pedro to impress on his young helper that he should be down to breakfast earlier. More jokes are apparent when the trio of detectives (including Pedro under this umbrella) arrive at Salisbury heading for nearby Losely Hall to find Sir Richard's old side-kick, Lobangu, decked out in Savile Row finery with uncharacteristic gold braid from top to toe. Thus attired, he hopes to convince the British Government to back him up in laying claim to a rich rubber forest just beyond his own country's borders. He has also come to England for some gramophone-needles and what he calls a stink-car. Sir Richard has graciously loaned him an old Dion auto he keeps in the stables to learn to drive which is unbreakable. Marble Italian statues and orchid glasshouses are not so sturdy, however, and end up smashed to smithereens.

All these comic goings-on are but a prelude to the main plot which has two crook photographers who legitimately take pictures of Sir Richard's wealthy neighbour's jewels for insurance purposes and then proceed to systematically steal them, house by house, and secrete them in an old disused bower house on the Losely property. The ghosts of the title come about by the crook photographers letting fearsome effigies be seen at the windows while they are hiding their hauls of jewelry.

A final joke, but only to those uninitiated into Sexton B lore - like me! After the words "The End", appear the celebrated initials "C.H." One's brain buzzes with the thought that Charles Hamilton wrote

Sexton Blake tales, too! One murmurs in disbelief at a vast, new uncovered field of research at this late stage. But no! One puts aside this monumental discovery as the name of Cecil Hayter materializes from the packed pages of the Sexton Blake Catalogue. Ah, well!

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

MY CHRISTMAS VISIT

by C. H. Churchill

The big question is where shall I go this Christmas? You see I have such a lot of attractive places on offer that I find it difficult to decide which would be the best. Let us consider the pros and cons of some of them.

First of all take Tregellis Castle. What a splendid time I would have down there in Cornwall. Dancing, skating on the lake (weather permitting), country walks, very pleasant company and wonderful food. As for the service, well, as hostess, Lady Helen Tregellis-West's expert guidance would ensure this. All would be fine but there is the thought of that Cloaked Cavalier who might be seen walking across the snow covered lawn at any moment, or appearing in the upper corridor! I really must think carefully before deciding on Tregellis Castle although Sir Montie is most pressing.

Lord Dorrimore is holding a party at Cliff Castle in Kent. This sounds most attractive with popular guests including the one and only Umlosi, King of the Kutas. What strikes me, however, is what about the face at the window of the billiards room one evening? The mystery that was never cleared up? It might appear again so this makes me hesitate to accept Dorrie's invitation.

Then there is Somerton Abbey in Somerset, the ancestral home of the popular Duke of that ilk. Quite a step up in the social scale of course but there is this business of the sealed room, where an intruder once hid and haunted the corridors of the Abbey made up as a ghost. Supposing someone else managed to get into that room and carried on in the same way. They might disturb my dreams. I must ponder on this carefully.

Grey Towers in Berkshire is another possibility. But it seems as if Sir Crawford has servant problems so it might not be too comfortable there. I really think I will give this a miss.

I know Dr. Stafford would be delighted to put me up at St. Frank's if I liked. But with the whole school empty and in view of what happened when Nipper & Co. once spent Christmas there, well I am dubious. I ask you! Intruders in the vaults and monsters prowling about Bellton Lane hardly augurs well for a quiet holiday.

Lord Dorrimore, being so wealthy, has several homes, but it would be no good my turning up at Dorrimore Hall in Suffolk or at Dorrimore Castle in Derbyshire if he is entertaining at Cliff Castle in Kent would it?

What about Glenthorne Manor? The Colonel, no doubt, would make me welcome. However, I do like my sleep and would not welcome girls running about outside in the grounds in the middle of the night, screaming. I don't think I shall visit Glenthorne Manor.

I like the New Forest actually, although it might be a bit grim in December. All the same I might join Archie Glenthorne who is visiting his aunt, Lady Eustacia Bowers at Forest House. But I do not like this mention of her being mixed up in black magic with this Nerki person. It all sounds a bit weird to me so I think I must settle for somewhere else.

There is Handforth Towers of course. On second thoughts this idea rather makes me shudder. The fact of about four Handforths being around all the time puts the hope of peace and quiet right out of the question. I do not think they will see me there this year.

After considering the matter very carefully I feel I must make it Tregellis Castle after all, despite the hauntings. I hear that the charming Miss Eileen Dare and her fiance, Capt. Masters will be there and with the elegant Lady Helen as hostess and Nelson Lee and the likeable Lord Westbrook in attendance, I feel I need fear nothing from this wretched Cloaked Cavalier. So, as I settle down to enjoy my Christmas at Tregellis Castle by means of Nelson Lee Library old series No. 130, I wish all readers and members of the hobby the compliments of the season and all the best for 1980.

WINTER

by William Lister

Spring - Summer - Autumn - Winter, at least that's how it should

be, and that's how it was, so far as those of us who are older remember it. Not that things are the same today. These days you can be frozen to death in Spring, soaked to the skin in Summer, blown off the Prom in Autumn, while the highlight of Winter - Christmas Day - can produce a spell of soft warm sunshine. That being so I suggest that if you wish to enjoy an old-fashioned Christmas find a cosy spot, turn off the radio or T.V. and pick for yourself a copy or copies of the Christ-editions of the 'NELSON LEE' or the 'UNION JACK'! I am aware that most readers of our 'Collectors' Digest' will prefer a copy of the 'Magnet' or 'Gem' and there is no doubt these excellent papers abound in Christmas fare.

It is my intention, God willing, to share some of my winter's reading with the boys of Greyfriars also, though I am first and foremost a 'St. Frank's' man, and a 'Sexton Blake' enthusiast, I am not so foolish as to miss sharing in the treble seasonal treats provided by our good friends, Edwy Searles Brooks, Charles Hamilton, and the authors of the 'Union Jack' tales.

Those who can remember the 'Titbits' and 'Answers' of former days realise how the mighty have fallen when it comes to the Christmas editions. There was a splendour about the seasonal editions of almost all the papers, a splendour now gone, unless you are the proud possessor of some of the Old Boys' Papers, their editors really went to town to see we had a good Christmas. Holly and mistletoe abounded, snow hung in huge overhanging lumps from the letters of the title page, while the interior illustrations dripped icicles of considerable length. And after all that's what Christmas is all about to an Englishman, and to our American friends.

Edwy Searles Brooks, Charles Hamilton and Gwyn Evans along with a few others, are names that still conjur up thoughts of a good Christmas reading. Very few modern writers can catch the right seasonable atmosphere to suit the taste of members of the O.B.B.C. The reason being that most of the younger writers have not experienced a real old-fashioned Christmas. The writers mentioned are of our generation, to them, a chicken or a turkey dinner, followed by ye old plum pudding was the living end, and if perchance, it was snowing outside, life was well and truly buttered, even had jam on it; so to speak.

Tales of ghosts and spectres of various kinds were likely to appear, but if they didn't you could be sure they would in your favourite paper.

Which brings me back to the 'Nelson Lee' and the boys of St. Frank's. By the light of an oil-lamp I would share the games and the parties along with Handforth, Nipper, Nelson Lee, Fatty Little, Archie Glenthorne and a host of others.

Outside the darkening sky, the steadily falling snow, the roof of the little caravan creaking with the weight of the thick layers of snow laid upon it, (occasionally eased by a poke with the yard brush) with no T.V., no wireless, not even a gramophone; inside I enjoyed Christmas in a way I remember to this day. Surrounded this year, (God-willing), by the bricks and mortar of a sturdy little terraced house, its roof protecting me from such inclement weather as may be about and with no need to go out with the yard brush to relieve the situation on the roof, even if it does snow, and with a coloured T.V. awaiting me to switch on, a Grundig Recorder and a Hi-Fi also awaiting my good pleasure I intend to retire to some cosy spot away from all the mod-cons and once again lift the curtain on the Yuletide adventures of the boys of St. Frank's, thrill to the things that E.S.B. causes to go bump-in-the-night, watch the snow falling steadily on and around the old school, and climb aboard the school train (recently illustrated on the cover of the C.D.) and away to whatever treat E.S.B. has provided for my Christmas holiday, I may lengthen my stay to include an hour or two among the boys of Greyfriars, and a Yuletide adventure or two with Sexton Blake.

All this, of course, to be spread with the delights of the December 'Collectors' Digest' and the new 'C.D. Annual'.

Roll on, Christmas! I can't wait!

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 159 - Magnets 1244-46 - Mauleverer Towers Series

What a pleasure it is to pick up a volume of Magnets of the Golden Age and read a Christmas series from that comfortable, mellow era! Of course, there was always seasonable weather at Yuletide:

There had been a fall of snow, and the old quad of Greyfriars school glimmered white in the December sunshine.

Who could resist such an invitation to read on? Furthermore, there was a tradition that each number in the series should have a note of mystery as well as festive happiness, and the Magnet Christmas series for the year 1931 fulfilled all these requirements.

Bunter was, as usual, the unwanted guest, the spectre at the feast, but his first attempt to accompany Lord Mauleverer to his ancestral mansion in Hampshire was an hilarious failure. He later hired a taxi to take him from Surrey and then successfully bilked the driver by jumping out in the grounds of the Towers, thus accidentally finding a secret passage that led to the Turret Room. This was a perfect example of the admirable economy of organisation that this series displayed: nearly every incident was essential to the plot and later proved to be a vital link in the subsequent chain of events.

There was plenty of mystery. In the first number, there was an attempt made to scare Bunter away when Bob Cherry donned a suit of armour and clanked his way to Bunter's bedroom at the dead of night, but Bunter surprisingly came off best on this occasion. If this incident was not strictly related to the plot, the attempts to blackmail and then kidnap Lord Mauleverer provided the central theme, and no reader could have failed to be enthralled by the mysterious figure in black.

There were a number of points of interest. Sir Jimmy Vivian had a few lines to speak, and in what was probably his last appearance in the Magnet he seemed to have overcome the difficulties he had experienced in speaking standard English. Lord Mauleverer himself showed an unexpectedly decisive side to his character when he insisted that Bunter should leave at once for having picked up and read a letter addressed to one of the servants. Needless to say, Bunter contrived to avoid this fate, and Mauleverer himself would have been wiser if he had been less scrupulous, but the unattractive side of Bunter's character was well displayed in this series, though on balance he still retained the sympathy of the readers, especially when he foiled the plot by accident at the end. Finally, the first number of the series (1244) had a most attractive feature: the initial letter of each chapter was embellished with a small picture like a Medieval text and this contrived to produce an unusually decorative appearance.

The essential feature of a Christmas holiday series in the

Magnet was a sense of cosy intimacy, a restricted circle of close friends who were sufficient unto themselves to preserve the traditional atmosphere. Although Marjorie and Clara arrived with Peter Hazeldene about half-way through, they played no real part in the events related, and there can be little doubt that the close unity and novelty of the Mauleverer Towers series entitled it to rank among the greatest of Christmas series in the Magnet.

* * * * *

AT CHRISTMAS

by Esmond Kadish

This time of the year always seems to revive half-forgotten memories of the pleasant anticipation of waiting for a "Grand Christmas Number" of one of the companion papers. There was an even greater thrill involved when I finally trotted down to the local "paper shop" and had the magic issue firmly within my grasp at last. What a nice glowing feeling it gave me just to look at those two-colour "seasonable" covers! I suppose, really, that it was a case of "little things please little minds", but it was surprising how the addition of a few sprigs of holly, and the inevitable and obligatory snow oozing down the title letters, like icing sugar on a Christmas cake, helped to transform the familiar orange and blue or red and blue covers.

Among my favourite Christmas covers are the 1933 "Magnet" issues illustrating the "Mystery of Wharton Lodge" series - my favourite Greyfriars Christmas series, too. There was Bunter trailing sausages as he took his stolen "tuck" up the grand staircase of Wharton Lodge to the attic where he was hiding. Another delightful cover in this series shows Bunter leaning out of a dormer window to drop a snowball on the unsuspecting head of Colonel Wharton, who is lighting a pipe underneath. Other "Magnet" covers which delighted me - and still do! - were those of the 1935 and '36 Christmas series. One of the 1935 "Polpelly series" covers is captioned, "They'll think it was the cat!" and shows our Billy raiding the larder, and surveying the goods with obvious delight, while a feline (ancestor of Princess Snowee, perhaps?) accomplice purrs round his ankles. The 1936 Christmas issue shows Bunter racing to catch the train which will take the Greyfriars chums on the first stage of the "Cruise of the 'Firefly'".

Leonard Shields, who drew all these "Magnet" covers, had a great sense of humour, and there was a wealth of clever detail in his illustrations, springing from some shrewd observation of human behaviour. He carried these qualities into his drawings for the "Schoolgirls' Own", although the cover illustrations were more blue-ink sketches inside an orange frame than proper two-colour paintings. Two Christmas covers of the "Schoolgirls' Own" which I recall with affection, came from 1933 and '34. The former shows Jack Linton perched high on a beam in a high-ceilinged French château, fixing some mistletoe and contriving to throw a sprig of either mistletoe or holly on to the Morcove girls below. The 1934 cover shows the Morcove girls and Grangemoor boys peering through the gateway of one of those large manor houses to which they all seemed to be so fortunately and regularly invited.

Laidler's Christmas covers to illustrate the Cliff House stories of John Wheway in the "Schoolgirl" were equally delightful. I can recall a 1933 issue which shows the Cliff House girls in Victorian "gear", about to embark on a journey by stage-coach to "Christmas Castle" where they are to spend an "old-fashioned" Christmas.

Then there are those delightful red and blue "Gem" covers of the 'thirties, usually including some spectral presence. But why go on? There are so many more, and everyone has his own favourites.

* * * * *

REVIEWS

THE GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUAL 1980

(Howard Baker: £4.95)

This is a worthy volume to join the distinguished number of these specially-compiled Holiday Annuals prepared for our enjoyment in recent years. The first item on the programme is the Magnet's Christmas Double Number for 1915. Up till that time, and for a while after, there was nothing to suggest the austerity of Britain in war-time.

The story "Harry Wharton & Co's Pantomime" is, perhaps, slightly uneven in its quality, but it settles down into real red Magnet stuff and provides delightful reading for the Christmas season. The Greyfriars chums join with a pantomime company in "Puss in Boots", to make money to provide comforts for the troops in France. The producer is a Mr. Whiffles, who strikes a happy note, though he is, presumably, not related to that Mr. Whiffles who, years later, was to run a circus. Frank Nugent falls in love with Conchita, the Fairy Queen in the show, and he doesn't fall out of love till Conchita tells him gently that she is approaching middle-age and is, in fact, betrothed to another.

Then a leap forward to Christmas 1917 for yet another Double Number. There is not a lot to recommend, storywise, in this one, but it is full of interest. It was the Magnet's last Christmas Double Number. It was still priced at 2d. for the double, but it now comprised 32 pages whereas the 1915 edition had 52 pages. The story "The Greyfriars Christmas Party" was written by Pentelow. The odd thing about this one, which actually had a sequel the following week, is that the main characters, Harry Wharton and his friends, only make a fleeting appearance. I can think of no other time when the stars were out of the picture most of the time.

In fact, all the overseas characters of the three Hamilton schools are collected together, the reason for which is explained in a few meagre lines, to spend Christmas at Greyfriars under the charge of Mr. Prout. The two Bunter brothers, naturally, have to be there, but their presence does little to improve matters. An old C.D. reader, the late Harry Broster of our Midland O.B.B.C., liked this story, and wrote an article on it under the title, "They Came From Over the Sea" in the C.D. Annual for 1960. Readers would find much interest in this bygone article if they read it in connection with the story.

Also in this Double Number is Pentelow's famous Who's Who of Greyfriars. Some of our friends just love this sort of thing, though it is as well to remember that there is more of Pentelow in it than of Hamilton.

Then another Christmas Number, this time from 1920. The year 1920 was the worst in Magnet history, for the real Frank Richards wrote no series at all for it in the year, and only a few not very inspired "singles". This story, "Harry Wharton's Trust", is a genuine tale, and a reasonably exciting little thriller, which introduces Figgins & Co. of St. Jim's at Kerr's home in Edinburgh. It closes with the notice that Harry Wharton has to "gather in Jack Drake and Dick Rodney of the Benbow", for his Christmas party. A rather odd happening, really.

Charles Hamilton said that some of the stories which he wrote for "Greyfriars Boys' Herald" were actually published in the Magnet, and it is possible that this one may have been a pair which he wrote to start off Jack Drake at Greyfriars in the Herald. (In connection with this story, readers might like to look up two of our "Let's Be Controversial" articles, as follows: No. 155, "The Strange Case of Thin Bunter", Feb, 1971 and No. 190, "Last Voyage", April 1974.)

Now a change to St. Jim's for a Gem of the New Year 1937. The story is "The Funk of the Fourth", originally named "Not Wanted" at the end of 1913. For some reason, this is a little-known tale, introducing a new boy, Cavendish, who disappeared at the end of the tale. A second Gem in the volume comes from later in the same year, entitled "The New House Riot", which had appeared in late 1915 as "Redfern's Barring-Out". Both tales make pleasant reading.

A copy of "The Schoolgirl" from the summer of 1937 will be popular with followers of the later Cliff House. The main story is "Bessie's Dream Comes True", in which riches come unexpectedly to a Bessie who is somewhat different from the Bessie Charles Hamilton created.

The final issue is a Magnet from the year 1931, containing a splendid Bounder-Redwing story "A Schoolboy's Sacrifice". It is interesting to compare Hamilton's style in this one with his work in the 1915 tale.

Our own John Beck contributes a useful short history of the Holiday Annuals, and, finally, one must not overlook the excellent and true reproductions of the covers of the two Double Numbers.

Highly recommended volume.

TOM REDWING'S TRIUMPH

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £12)

This magnificent volume contains thirteen copies of the Magnet from early 1918. In with the New Year of 1918 came a new character, destined to be one of the most popular in the Greyfriars saga. He was Tom Redwing, one of Hamilton's greatest character creations, and destined to be the one the author was writing about at the time of his death.

With the coming of Redwing, there was a most striking upsurge in the quality of Hamilton's work. For quite a few years he had been far from his best, in the Magnet at least. Now, with the coming of Redwing, there was a vast change.

Why this happened we do not know, but I have always believed that, rightly or wrongly, he suddenly saw a threat from Pentelow, who was writing a fair number of Greyfriars tales and boosting them to the skies. Something, obviously, put Hamilton on his toes.

This handsome book, so tastefully presented and bound, contains the first Redwing series of 5 stories, and the second Redwing series of four stories, culminating with Redwing winning the scholarship which had been secretly offered by Mr. Vernon-Smith in the belief that Redwing would win it.

Half-way through the opening Redwing series, Pentelow published the most famous substitute story of them all, "A Very Gallant Gentleman". It mentions the early Redwing theme, so it would seem reasonable to suppose that it was written especially for this niche in the Magnet. For a long time afterwards the editor referred in glowing terms to "Gallant Gentleman", but, as the editor was Pentelow who wrote the story, he was not being modest and may not have been too accurate. All the same, the sentimentality of the tale might have won it a warm spot in the hearts of certain readers. You can decide for yourself, for the story appears in its original place, in this volume.

In addition, the volume contains a couple of war-time period pieces concerning the old German master, Herr Gans, and a merry romp starring Coker in a single story.

My only criticism of the book is that I think it would have made perfection to have included the third and final of the first three Redwing series, instead of the non-Redwing yarns. The last series, and particularly "Fallen Fortunes", stands out among Hamilton's finest writing.

However, even without the closing series, which appeared later in 1918, the volume is a superb one, with great period charm and appeal. Give yourself a Christmas treat, or arrange for Father Christmas to bring it along to you.

Readers with back numbers of Collectors' Digest should refer to our issue for January 1968, which contains a long article "The Sailor's Son" and also a separate appraisal of "A Very Gallant Gentleman". January 1968 was the Golden Jubilee of Redwing and of Gallant Gentleman.

PETER PAN AND WENDY

J. M. Barrie

(Hodder & Stoughton: £7.95)

This is a facsimile presentation of the 1921 edition of Barrie's famous story. It contains Barrie's complete text together with Mabel Lucie Atwell's original illustrations. It marks the 75th anniversary of the first appearance of Peter Pan, and it is Mabel Lucie Atwell's centenary year.

The cover - oh, the cover - it is a perfect delight, with its embossing and its inlaid gold leaf. It must be costly to do nowadays, but how wonderful those old books were. And to think that one used to find these beautiful covers on even cheap books in the dear dead days. A lovely book, delightful to read, and regal in your bookcase.

IN POWDER & CRINOLINE

(Hodder & Stoughton: £4.95)

Anne Carter has re-told six heart-warming fairy stories, which were originally collected and written by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in the far-off year of 1912. The original volume was illustrated with breathtaking beauty by Kay Neilson, and the plates are the outstanding feature of this lovely book. Kay Neilson died some twenty years ago, in reduced circumstances, and his work is now belatedly receiving the acclaim it so richly deserved.

FAIRY TALES of the BROTHERS GRIMM

(Hodder & Stoughton: £6.95)

"Tell me, mirror on the wall,
Who is fairest of them all?"

If you are anything like me, you love fairy tales. When I was a little lad, a cousin of mine had a book entitled "Snowdrop". Walt Disney made it into a film and the name was changed to Snow White.

This book is a reprint of a collection of Grimm from the year 1925, and this one, too, is illustrated by the superb Danish artist, Kay Neilson. His plates are lovely, and the chapter headings are something to gaze at with rapture. The volume contains "Snowdrop"; another old favourite of mine from childhood is the one with the talking horse, Faladda, the title of which I had long, long forgotten; it is "The Goose Girl". Other old favourites are "Hansel & Grethel", "Rumpelstiltskin", "The Valiant Little Tailor", and plenty more.

So much to love in this book, and so much beauty in Neilson's marvellous pictures.

* * * * *
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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 69. THE PIRATE

Our opening feature this term came from Warner's and was Virginia Mayo and Zachary Scott in "Flaxy Martin". I remember nothing about it. A coloured cartoon was "Kit for Kat", and one of those splendid Mack Sennett pot-pourris which Warner's were concocting at this time was "Slap Happy".

Next week, also from Warner's, brought Dane Clark in "Whiplash", which seems to have been quite forgettable. A Technicolor Extravaganza was "King of the Carnival", and a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon was "Catch as Cats Can".

The following week brought "Perfect Strangers" from M. G. M. This was made in the M. G. M. British studios, and starred Robert Donat (his last film for M. G. M.), Deborah Kerr and Glynis Johns. The "strangers" in the story were a husband and wife who had each served in the navy during the war, and found it difficult to adjust when they came together again after the war was over. I reckon the cast probably helped it over what sounds like a rather dull stile. A Bugs Bunny coloured cartoon was "The Bear and the Hare", and a Joe McDoakes comedy was "So You Want to be an Actor".

Next, from M. G. M., was Judy Garland and Gene Kelly in "The Pirate" in Technicolor. This was superb entertainment, but, though it was supposed to be a starring vehicle for Judy Garland, it was really Gene Kelly in a tremendous swashbuckling role who stole the entire film. I fancy he had been a circus acrobat in his time, which no doubt helped him to

out-Fairbanks Douglas Fairbanks who did this sort of thing in much earlier times. A coloured cartoon was "Slap Happy Lion" and a 3-Stooges comedy from Columbia was "Phoney Express".

Then the longest film of the term (10,354 ft.). This came from M. G. M. and was Jeanette Macdonald and Jose Iturbi in "The Birds and The Bees" in Technicolor. Iturbi had a band, and also played the piano, but, in addition, he was quite a good actor, if my memory is not playing me tricks. There was a big supporting cast, and it was Miss Macdonald's return to the screen after a long absence. I seem to recall that she played a more mature role - a mother with 3 daughters - in this film than she had played of yore, but I can't remember a lot about it. In the same bill there was a gorgeous Tom & Jerry cartoon "Love That Pup", one of the most delightful in the whole enormous series.

Next, from Warner's, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall in "The Big Sleep", which was probably a winner though I forget all about it. A colour cartoon was "The Foxy Duckling" and a Technicolor Speciality was "A Day at the Fair".

Then, also from Warner's, Richard Greene and Ann Todd in "Gaiety George", which was a British film. The "George" was George Edwardes of the Gaiety Theatre in the London of late Victorian and Edwardian times. I fancy it was attractive. In a big supporting bill there was a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon

"Tennis Chumps".

Next, from M. G. M., Margaret O'Brien in "The Big City". The critics observed that M. G. M. made three films with this title, and not one of them was a winner. This one had a bit of a mixed-up religious flavour, and I imagine that, with the child star, though getting a big girl by now, it went over well. A Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon was "Little Quacker".

Next, in Technicolor, from M. G. M.: Esther Williams in "This Time for Keeps". Jimmy Durante was in this one, with some singing, and plenty of swimming, and it got by. Yet another Tom & Jerry cartoon in colour was "Little Orphan".

Finally, and also from M. G. M., came "Summer Holiday" in glowing Technicolor, with Micky Rooney, Walter Huston and Butch Jenkins. It was a musical re-make of the heart-warming family

comedy "Ah! Wilderness", which we had played years before - and not a patch on it. (Reminds one of what a hash they made when they turned out a musical version of "Good-bye, Mr. Chips".)

In the same show was another Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "The Lonesome Mouse" and a Pete Smith novelty "Penny to the Rescue", the first Pete Smith in colour.

I see that this term we played no less than five new Tom & Jerry cartoons. What a lot of them they made down the years, and how good they were. When the title came up on our screen there was always a roar of joy. (What happened to Tom & Jerry later on, when new artists took over, is nobody's business - but, oh dear!)

(Another article in this series next month.)

* * * * *

The Postman Called

(Interesting items from the Editor's letter-bag)

Laurie Sutton (Orpington): In the October C.D. you mention the old Brixton Theatre as being a fine home for drama, and how right you were!

In the late 'thirties I was almost a weekly visitor there, and the first-class company included such names as Arnold Bell, Wyndham Milligan, Noel Carey, Colin Gordon, Jenny Laird, Joan Matheson, Beatrice Varley. Many of these fine artists later achieved national recognition through TV and films.

Brixton Theatre had spellbound audiences for such plays as "The Sacred Flame", or "Rope" (which I saw three times in one week, accompanied by my younger brother). My addiction to the repertory company (at the age of 14) followed something like a dozen visits to the 1936 pantomime, with Low and Webster (broker's men) and Muriel Pavlow as one of the "Babes in the Wood".

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: "Rope" is indeed a splendid psychological thriller, based on a real-life case in America. Years ago, an excellent stock company took over the Hillcroft Theatre in Surbiton. After a series of fine plays, I asked the manager if they would present "Rope". He made a note of it but said: "Did you know that 'Rope' is considered an unlucky play? It brings bad luck to all who present it."

A few weeks later, he told me that they were presenting "Rope". I have an open mind about the jinx on the play, but it turned out to be the last play the company presented, and, later on, the Hillcroft Theatre was no more.)

H. TRUSCOTT (Deal): Jim Cook manages to give the impression, in his latest 'Letter from St. Frank's', that Rachmaninov wrote many C sharp minor Preludes, all very much the same. In fact, he wrote one, a very early piece the disproportionate reputation of which the composer always deplored. Apart from one ascent to a climax in the middle of the piece, which does gradually increase speed, it is a very steady work, its tempo impressive and the reverse of fast; it is certainly not a gallop. Any horse which galloped at the main tempo of this piece would come in a very poor last. Also, there is a difference between controlled, full-blooded pianoforte tone and noise. The performance to which Mr. Cook referred may not have been a good one, but he did infer that there were many C sharp minor preludes by Rachmaninov and that they all had the offensive qualities he lists. Even the excitement of writing about St. Frank's should not prevent a certain amount of accuracy.

GERALD FISHMAN (New York): We have just returned from England and Scotland, and I, as a native, must confess to some sadness at what I saw. The island is changing, be it Glasgow or London, and not, I fear, for the best. Hi-rise apartments will not bring a healthier environment, massive traffic jams on formerly peaceful roads will not give us a higher standard of living, promiscuous sexual, and discourteous behaviour will not bring us together, Metric systems, decimal pounds, European Parliaments, and North Sea oil will not serve as a substitute for hard work, discipline of mind and body, respect for elders, country, and tradition. Britain, like America, is at the crossroads. It may, in fact be too late. Chaos is the order in both lands, and unless we turn back to the ways of our fathers and their fathers, we are lost. The lunatics are running the asylum.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): As one who thrilled to the "Phantom of Cursitor Fields", and who really believed such a place existed, I am inclined to accept Bill Lofts' explanation as to its likely origin. The "Phantom" first made the Bullseye headlines with No. 14, and I still remember the impact it made on me at the time. It proved such a winner that it was later brought back by "popular demand". But not the same phantom as the original had been unmasked. The second was a carbon copy of the first, with only the identity changed. Set against the cobbled streets and alley-ways of Old Cheapside, with a network of secret tunnels and doors, the whole enveloped in swirling mists or fog - the atmosphere was phantom made for the stories which followed. The illustrated work for the series was of the highest calibre, and did so much to put the stories across. They were not so much frightening as baffling; how was the Phantom able to elude the police week after week, and be immune to bullets? Seen now, many of the explanations were very far-fetched indeed, but then so much of boys' fiction was. Bullseye was never quite the same after its departure, though an attempt was made to capitalise on its success with "The Phantom Highwayman of London Fields". In the event, this proved a rather 'spiritless' tale with only a modest run. Here, at any rate, no mystery surrounds the locale, as any resident of Hackney will tell you.

N. YANDLE (Redcar): Is there amongst the reader of C.D. an authority on the Girls' Own Paper? Some sixty years ago I was in a local nursing home for an appendicitis operation, and the Matron lent me some bound vols. of the Girls' Own Paper about 1900 vintage, in one of which was a serial about a girl named Oshaughnessie. For some reason, perhaps the onset of second childhood, I have a desire to read it again. Research at the local library has not produced any clues as to the name of the story or author. I wonder if any reader of C.D. can help.

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): In answer to R. J. Lewis (Oct. C.D.) Frederick William Robinson wrote at least seventy novels between 1855 and 1890. "The House of Elmore" was first published at the former date so his mother must have got a late reprint. It certainly seemed a strange present for a girl of 13, as Robinson was an adult writer of very grim novels. His most famous was "Female Life in Prison" written under the

nom-de-plume of 'By a Prison Matron' in 1862.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Mrs. Mary Cadogan, who contributes a major article "Do you Believe in Fairies?" in the new C.D. Annual, also writes on the Girls' Own Paper for which 1980 will be the Centenary Year.)

WANTED REALLY WANTED: Two issues of the Magnet, Nos. 948, 949. Any help will be greatly appreciated, believe me. Thank you.

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WANTED URGENTLY: For 3 months hire. 4/6 berth campervan v.w. or similar. Good condition (I'm no mechanic). Have driven most everything (even and around the bend at times). Our once-in-a-lifetime chance to see old friends only previously written to. Do not let high rental costs cut down our mileage. ERN, AUDREY, LARAINÉ & SHARON DARCY
47 FISHER ST., MAIDSTONE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3012.

News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

MIDLAND

Meeting held 30th October, 1979

The gathering of the clans after our Summer break was attended by nine members on a night showery and uninviting out-of-doors, but inside our room at Dr. Johnson's house all was warm, cosy and comfortable.

A touch of sadness came over us all as we stood in silence before the start of our meeting to remember an old comrade of the Old Boys' Book fraternity, John Tomlinson, who has died since we last met. John was a real enthusiast remarkably well informed and critical as all genuine enthusiasts are. His lively conversation and dry wit, the older members will remember with sadness that it is no more. The club sent a wreath to John's funeral and was represented by Joe Marston, who lives at Burton not too far from John's home.

John has left a number of books for sale and a list was passed round for members to mark off books in which they were interested.

A discussion on the ages of boys in the Remove Fourth Form and Shell was started by Geoff Lardner, who said he was often puzzled by the inconsistency of the stories in this respect and the substitute writers often altered the school's organisation if it suited them.

Our usual feature Anniversary No. was Popular No. 405, published on 30th October, 1926. The Collectors' Item was a bound volume of Nelson Lees (Old Series). The dates from 9th June, 1917 to 1st September, 1917. No. 105 contains the first mention of Umlosi.

Hot coffee, Jaffa Cakes and Cadbury's Miniature chocolates provided by Vince Loveday and George Chatham refreshed us during our discussions.

A reading from the Bunter Book, "Bunter the Bad Lad" showing Coker doing his funny turn writing limericks was read by Jack Bellfield, your correspondent.

There was time for two rounds of Tom Porter's game, Greyfriars Bingo. It was amusing and illustrates the numerous characters that filled the Greyfriars scene. The winners were George Chatham and your correspondent.

Also on display was the Autumn number of "The Acorn" - a works magazine which is edited by our own George Chatham.

We meet again on 27th November, and hope for an improved attendance.

JACK BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the home of Vic Hearn on Sunday, 4 November, 1979.

The members learned with much concern that Bill Lofts was unwell. It was unanimously agreed to send Bill a "Get Well" card, signed by all the members present, together with best wishes for his speedy recovery.

A discussion took place on corporal punishment at school, and members recalled their varied experiences at school at various periods ranging from the early years of the century until the 1940's. Jack Overhill recalled various schools and schoolmasters of the period before and during the great War, which led him into one of his splendid reminiscences of social conditions in Cambridge in the early years of the Century. Jack's wonderful gift of almost total recall of the past made this a fascinating item. There was a discussion on how members' experiences of real school life compared with the image of life at the Hamilton and Brooks

school.

The meeting then enjoyed Vic's lavish hospitality, and resumed with a programme of items concerning 5th November. Vic Hearn produced a series of Pucks with seasonable illustrations. He recalled from his boyhood the thrill of going to the shop and selecting one's fireworks. He remarked that he had in later years got just as much enjoyment in buying fireworks for his own children. Keith had come prepared with some 5th November stories. Adrian Perkins recalled the Yorkshire practice of holding "Mischief Night" on 4th November a link between Hallow'een and 5th November. Bill Thurbon gave a resume of Harrison Ainsworth's "Guy Fawkes", a Victorian gothic historical novel about the Gunpowder Plot. Jack Overhill read the script of one of his Broadcast talks, based on undergraduates before 1914. When Cambridge came alive when "The men came up", the "Toffs"; including the Bonfire Night rags, and the chance of finding an unused firework. The talk concluded with an hilarious account of a somewhat inebriated undergraduate who decided to drown himself. Of how his friends and passing women tried to dissuade him, and of struggles to hold him down and his dashes for the river with the young Jack tagging on at the end; Jack had never seen anyone drown themselves before! Finally, presumably to the youthful Jack's disappointment, the man sobered up and was taken home. The meeting closed with a warm vote of thanks to Vic and Mrs. Hearn for their hospitality.

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 10th November. Winter darkness is now wrapped round the starting time of our meetings: always a rather bleak thought, and yet it somehow enhances the convivial glow within, like the pages of a Magnet Christmas Story.

Some discussion of topical issues included mention of the study "The Public School Phenomenon" recently brought out in paperback. Hamilton secures a passing reference - one he could have done without. The author describes the Magnet tales as being written in the kind of style which an army of hack writers could easily imitate, and quotes some six lines (!) from a late Magnet in support of this contention. He goes on to add that "snobbery is rampant" in the stories; evidence to prop up this allegation is that D'Arcy was an Hon. and the son of Lord Eastwood, while Mauleverer was an Earl. One could point out that Linley was a Lancashire mill-lad and Penfold a village cobbler's son; the author has not troubled to ascertain details like these. Why will writers of this kind not prepare their brief properly before advancing facile literary assessments and erecting fancy sociological theses on the strength of them?

Jack Allison had prepared another ingenious contest for us - a football match between Greyfriars and Highcliffe played out upon the squares of a crossword-puzzle. 'Friars were a man short, which may have accounted for their rather shaky defence, but the forwards were in irresistible form, and the Highcliffians were duly trounced 10 - 5. Investigations are proceeding to determine whether the loss of our man was due to the machinations of Ponsonby and his betting pals.

Next month is our Annual Christmas Party. Date, 8th December, and start at 4.30 at the Swarthmore Centre. As always, old friends, postal members, other Clubbites, wives and girl-friends are welcome. It helps our planning if you can give Mollie a ring first, though: Leeds 756615.

JOHNNY BULL

LONDON

Our London Club's report is included loose, as a supplement to this issue. This is due to our Christmas stocking being over-full to overflowing, and not to any late arrival of the report from the hard-working Secretary.